United Nations E/CN.6/2019/NGO/12

# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 November 2018

Original: English

**Commission on the Status of Women**
**Sixty-third session**
11–22 March 2019
**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"**

## Statement submitted by Baha'i International Community, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-18977 (E) 191118

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## Statement

## Creating the World Anew: Leaving No One Behind

At one level, social protection may be conceived of as the set of policies and programs designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability. A theme as weighty as providing social protection to all, particularly the most vulnerable — the majority of whom are women and children — must be considered in the light of a greater truth: that all of humanity is one, and all of humanity must benefit from the plentiful resources of our shared homeland. That all people have the right to lead lives of dignity, with opportunities to receive a quality education, to access healthcare, to practice their spiritual values, and to contribute their share to the well-being of their communities, through work, nurturing healthy families, and offering acts of service, should by now be an accepted truth.

Moreover, a clear implication of the oneness of humanity is that women and men are equal. The growing recognition of both oneness and the equality of women and men is a hallmark of the modern age — and one that augurs well for the gradual emergence of a global civilization characterized by justice, reciprocity, and prosperity. Nevertheless, the full expression of oneness in every facet of life has yet to be realized; indeed, its realization may at times feel out of reach. That women and girls are often the hardest hit by the injustices engendered in the current ordering of society is unsurprising given the historical forces that have given rise to that order. While growing acceptance of the principle of oneness was one of the greatest legacies of the twentieth century, many of the ideological underpinnings of prevalent societal systems are premised on values that are antithetical to oneness. Ideals of exclusion, belief in the inherent superiority of some groups over others, and reliance on adversarialism as a means of achieving progress are coded into the very DNA of the structures of society. What follows, then, is that the principle of oneness cannot be grafted superficially onto these; the systems and structures of society must be remolded to embody oneness.

A critical question before a body as significant as the United Nations and the Member States that comprise it is how to draw on and release the capacities and collective powers of all the world's peoples, including, critically, women and girls. Beyond institutional implications, principles of oneness and equality call for profound changes at the level of culture. No one is free from the exacting demands of justice; all will be called upon to continuously re-examine their own attitudes, values, and relationships with others.

## Addressing Economic Inequalities

As a result of social and cultural norms and inequalities, women experience stages of particular vulnerability throughout their life cycles. In many countries, women are much more likely than men to lose their income and fall into poverty. Even in the most economically advanced communities, women's reproductive roles have often meant they will not be afforded the same roles and responsibilities in the workforce as their male counterparts. There are many obstacles preventing women and girls from accessing public services and benefiting from strong infrastructure. Governance systems that promote collective security, environmental sustainability, and an equitable and just economic order are required to permanently remove them. Given their centrality to social protection, appropriate economic arrangements deserve special consideration.

Extreme concentrations of wealth have given rise to the distorted perception that the world lacks sufficient resources for all of its inhabitants. When considering how to bring all people out of poverty, there is an understandable temptation to focus on the generation of wealth. Attention to growth and income generation alone has very often translated into more wealth for those who do not need it, and increased deprivation for those who do. Regulatory structures that allow small numbers to amass unconscionable amounts of material resources for themselves and their kin cannot be perpetuated. So long as economic models continue to disregard and externalize moral considerations, such as justice and trustworthiness, global financial instability will continue to rise, and all of humanity will struggle.

Indeed, around the world the consequences of environmental degradation are being felt. Yet economic paradigms in most industrialized countries treat environmental impact as an externality. This has given rise to the impoverishment of rural communities, the exploitation of vulnerable populations, and the rapid deterioration of the natural world. Promising new models are arising that consider questions of economics in light of planetary boundaries. These models should be investigated to determine their potential as well as their limits. Generally, the global community may wish to devote substantial resources towards understanding how economic models organized around principles of collective trusteeship, justice, and reciprocity can emerge and adapt to the needs of different communities.

## Releasing the Powers of the Human Spirit

In communities around the world, a lack of material wealth has been an obstacle to attracting, training and retaining qualified teachers, and to erecting and maintaining educational facilities. Agenda 2030 emphasises strengthening public infrastructure as a means of providing education to all. While quality education does depend, to some degree, on a flow of material resources, the experience of many Baha'i communities at the grassroots suggests that even in the most remote and poverty-stricken areas of the world, there is a wealth of human resources that with time, attention, and the wise channelling of material means, can flourish.

When a community assesses the resources it does possess (for instance, the capacity of local inhabitants to identify challenges and consult upon solutions; the generosity of community members willing to donate time, talent, and materials to construct simple edifices and other provisions) limitations can give way to opportunities. Our experience has shown that initiating an educational process concerned with releasing the full range of human capacities does not need to be delayed until strong infrastructure is in place. A quality education requires attention to the entire educational process — the training of the teachers, the selection or development of appropriate curricula, the creation of an environment that is conducive to learning, and the engagement of the community within which the learning process unfolds. These different dimensions can be supplemented and strengthened by material resources, to a degree. Yet, even more crucial is ensuring that teachers and students be involved in a process of capacity building that releases the powers of the human spirit.

The human spirit — which can be regarded in one sense as the collection of endowments that distinguish human beings from other species, including the human mind — has the capacity to know, to love, and to will. It is a force that has for too long been undervalued, and as such, humanity has been deprived of a limitless source of prosperity. Releasing its powers requires an education that would help children develop the skills and knowledge needed to both transform their characters and lead productive lives. This would include engagement with literature and the arts, scientific training, mastery of technical skills, ability to participate in individual and

collective decision-making processes, and developing the capacity to identify needs and consult upon solutions. As their capabilities gradually develop and find expression in the community, there is a burgeoning of those arts, sciences, innovations, philosophies and ethics upon which civilization depends.

## Creating the World Anew

The inability to provide social protection for women and girls at every stage of their lives is only one of the symptoms of an outdated social order. This requires that the current order be pushed to its limits through policy change, through the enactment of just legislation, and through measures to close the gaps of extreme inequalities. However, these changes, though necessary, will prove insufficient in bringing about the new patterns of life that will allow all people to thrive. Given that many of the systems and structures of society were designed precisely to reinforce domination and inequality, significant resources must also be channelled towards learning about effective models of governance, education, and economics structured around an entirely new set of principles: that human beings are one, that women and men are equal, that the emergent powers of the collective can be released through cooperation and reciprocity, and that humanity's progress will be greatly bolstered by the full participation of all people in creating the world anew.